GLC 63
CAMERON

WRITINGS

NO APOLOGIES: A LAKOTA LESBIAN PERSPECTIVE,
[19--]
[2 pages]

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No Apologies, A Lakota Lesbian Perspective

If sage and sweet grass are not part of your culture, why are you burning it?

You too can be a Native American lesbian. (In fact, **anyone** living in the USA can claim to be Native American.) Our cultures, religions, religious icons, music, art and even
the realm of Native great-grandmothers are desecrated within the USA lesbian community without qualm, with moral righteousness. Those of us who have been raised as Native by our great-grandmothers and grandmothers are chastised for merely suggesting a hint of the wrongness of the appropriation of Native lives and cultures. The "rights" of instant Indians are becoming paramount to those of us who grew up as Native. The "neo Native Americans", in the meantime, make money as Native people selling fake and inferior "Native art," get jobs listing a Native American identity, pretend to understand and experience intergenerational stress, and make a premeditated effort to discredit those of us raised as Indians. They purchase their sage from feminist, new age or gay/lesbian bookstores, burning it sacrilegiously. They attend sundance on their vacations while their parents play golf over Native cemetaries. A few have been successful in cajoling tribal officials to enroll them as tribal members. They flash their tribal enrollment cards as a source of their legitimacy. As equally distressing is the lassitude of many people of color toward Native Americans. Some people of color state they are part Native American but have virtually no connection or interaction with Native people. But it makes for angst poetry bemoaning a lost identity. Some contemporary writers steal our words, make our truth their lies.

The thoughtless trendiness of the "neo Native American", in effect, makes a mockery of those Native people who were unable to grow up Native due to adoption into non Native homes or removal from their families and cultures because of the difficult social conditions that Native people exist in or for any number of reasons. The "neo Native American" adds an unnecessary and unwelcome layer to a complex issue of identity within Native communities. The often touted gaydar, that instinctive knowing of who is gay and lesbian by even a mere glance, has a relative in nadar, our instinctual knowing of who is Native. The hunting season on Native cultures and lives must end. Those hunters know who you are. Your bullets may not be shotgun pellets but are as damaging.

The troubling attachment and appropriation of Native cultures by members of the lesbian community is undeniably an act of hate violence against us, it is an element of the silent violence that Chief Fools Crow accurately assessed as the primary menace to our health and well-being.

Trying to exist in the lesbian/gay/queer communities, especially as a Native person, requires vigilance against covert pressure to become "racially neutral," the racial equivalence of androgyny. A racially neutral person is non-threatening, "ethnically safe," but still exotic. The pressure is subtle and perhaps unconscious. Sometimes it is expedient to be racially neutral, to pretend that we are not who we are rather than be assaulted with racist reality. The spiritual toll, however, is costly. There is also deliberate but surreptitious actions by the cartel of the lesbian/gay community to undermine and politically neutralize people of color. These tactics, either through direct attacks or by lack of consistent and meaningful support of our projects and social concerns, seemingly have tacit approval of those not in leadership positions. If we make mistakes, we are never forgiven and its never forgotten, in contrast to some white lesbian and gay leaders who get promoted and even more support *because* of their mistakes. And some of these leaders have attained almost god-like reverence even though they are openly racist. Equally frustrating are those individuals who subscribe to multiculturalism pr ecisely because it is submerged and regurgitated as something less than racism; providing for them a convenient pretext of addressing racism. Other individuals assert that they are above racism, beyond racism 101, and certainly should not be challenged on it at anytime. This behavior is quite similar

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to white persons who have lived on Indian reservations and then believe they are experts on us, they know how we think and the causes of our behaviour.

Hatred of Natives is subtle, it is blatant, it remains unchanged, unchallenged and is pervasive. Your hatred of us ranges from buying Jeep Cherokees, supporting sports teams like the Washington Redskins and to thoughtlessly repeating "harmless" phrases such as "long time no see," "hold the fort," "bottom of the totem pole," "the wild west," etc. Gentle r acism tells us we'll never get our land back, our treaties will never be honored (the message is don't bother telling me about your unimportant issues). Why is it necessary for you to remind us of your acquiescence to illegal and immoral acts of your government? The muffling of Native-related issues is clear evidence that even the most politically astute lesbian does not escape the hatred of Native people that goes to the earth's core, deep and fiercely burning.

I make choices. I am standing in a line of lesbians waiting to enter a community event. I overhear a lesbian say to another, "long time no see," I want to turn and ask her to simply say "I haven't seen you in a long time," or some other variation of acknowledgement. I choose to say nothing. These lesbians could become "hostile" because of my request. It's harmless they would say. I have learned that confronting white lesbians about their racism is like holding a live grenade. I don't relish abrading anyone nor do I appreciate that somehow it is my responsibility to clarify what is racist to us. But it is galling to encounter the glass walls of the lesbian/gay community and knowing that those glass walls have remained clear and unstreaked in my 20+ years of trying to find a home there.

The silent violence is also a world of agonizing decisions for many Native lesbians and gay men who choose to leave the rural reservations, pueblos, and Native enclaves to live in urban areas. We, like other lesbians and gay men, seek companionship, love and sex. We, unlike other lesbians and gay men, are forced to disrupt family, clan, and tribal obligations that sustain and define us. We leave behind those special places on the prairies, in the mountains and the desert, far from the reaches of city lights. We leave behind the seasonal ceremonies that nourish our spiritual lives. Whether we like it or not, to be openly lesbian or gay, often means being away from home and those connections that hold us together as Native people.

Native lesbians and gay men are increasingly self-naming as two spirit or two spirited rather than lesbian or gay. It aptly describes not only our sexual orientation but the duality of our lives. I have made the choice to disrupt a full Lakota life to live in the relative freedom that lesbian/gay San Francisco portends. The Native American community is invisible in the state of California. There are few reminders that California is Indian land even the racist images that are found in western states are missing. My merging of a lesbian and Native life in San Francisco is not seamless. Sometimes I think of it as balancing the impossible but I know that if I must choose between attending a powwow or the annual lesbian/gay freedom day, you will find me at the powwow.

My opinions and experiences belong to me. I don't pretend to represent the Native lesbian communities. In fact, some Native lesbians will vehemently disagree with my assessment of the neo Native American trend. Other Native lesbians believe that our cultural and religious institutions are open to anyone. I strongly believe our ceremonies should be closed to non Native people unless specifically invited or if they are members of our families. Some will tell you that view is "not Indian". But as long as I honor, in my heart, my grandparents, my ancestors, then the question of balancing a Native lesbian identity is answered.

"The things being done to the Indians today might best be called silent violence. It is not necessary to have armed confrontations or to destroy with fire and guns in order to have violence. The silent violence is what is crushing the Indian people today." Chief Fools Crow (Lakota)

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